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SUBJECT: MALAWI ELECTION OBSERVATION PLANS

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¶1. (SBU) Election observation for Malawi's May 19 presidential and parliamentary elections will be robust. The U.S. Mission will deploy 17 observation teams and will be joined by British High Commission, Canadian High Commission, German Technical Cooperation (GTZ), and Iceland International Development Agency (ICEIDA) observers. The combined diplomatic missions will deploy 60 teams to 27 of Malawi's 28 districts. The European Union has deployed a full international mission of over 80 observers who will cover the entire country. The African Union, Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), and SADC Parliamentary Forum will also field observer missions. The Malawi Electoral Support Network (MESN), funded by a USAID grant through the National Democratic Institute, will provide local monitoring, as will the National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE), an EU-funded government of Malawi organization. Disenfranchisement due to voter roll errors, vote tabulation, and results management will all be key areas for observers and monitors to watch. Comment: The EU Mission's verdict will be important, but U.S.-funded MESN will likely provide the most accurate, comprehensive, and rapid report on the elections due to a statistically-based sample. MESN's estimate of the actual result should add value to the qualitative assessments of other groups and counter any false claims by candidates and political parties. End Summary.

U.S. Deployment Plan

¶2. (SBU) The U.S. Mission in Lilongwe will deploy 36 accredited election observers to 13 of Malawi's 28 districts for the May 19 elections. There will be 17 observer teams, each consisting of one American staff member and at least one locally engaged staff (LES) member. Observers will monitor polling day activities including conduct at polling stations and vote tabulation at polling stations, constituency offices, and the Malawi Electoral Commission election headquarters. The U.S. Mission is coordinating with the British High Commission, Canadian High Commission, GTZ, and ICEIDA who will also feed observation reports to the U.S. Embassy control center. Combined, there will be 60 diplomatic observer teams covering 27 districts.

EU Mission Leads International Observers

¶3. (U) The European Union has sent a full observer mission to Malawi. The EU Observer Mission (EOM) chief observer and six experts arrived on April 3. Consisting of 28 long-term and 20 short-term international observers, the EOM will also be joined by local diplomatic observers from the EU Mission to

Malawi and other member states, bringing the total to approximately 80 participants. The EOM will cover all 28 districts in Malawi. With a budget of over \$3 million USD, the EOM expects to issue an initial statement within 48 hours of the polls closure on May 19. The Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) and the African Union have also sent observer missions. USAID's Southern Africa regional office is also funding an observer mission by the SADC Parliamentary Forum.

Local Monitors Will Have National Coverage

¶4. (SBU) In addition to political parties, NICE and MESN will perform local monitoring of the elections. NICE, which is wholly funded by the EU but formally a government of Malawi institution, will have monitors at every polling station. MESN, with funding from USAID through the National Democratic Institute (NDI), will deploy 800 local monitors to a statistically significant, random sample of polling stations throughout the country.

Potential Problems

¶5. (SBU) With well-documented problems with the initial voters roll (reftel) and a history of disputed election results, disenfranchisement, vote tabulation, and results management will be the key areas of observer interest. Although the Malawi Electoral Commission has manually inspected and corrected mistakes in the vast majority of voter registration applications, the political parties are still distrustful of the voter roll. If even a small number of voters are turned away, the situation could quickly snowball into claims of wholesale disenfranchisement.

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Political parties also complained about inadequate security and transparency in the transport of ballots.

EU, MESN Voices Should Have Impact

¶6. (SBU) Comment: As the largest and best funded international observer mission, the EU will have significant clout and its initial statements will go a long way toward establishing the credibility of the election. MESN will also be an important voice. MESN's status as a well-known indigenous non-governmental organization may carry more weight with many Malawians than international observers, some of whom will have been in Malawi for less than a week on polling day, or NICE. By using proven statistical methods and leveraging technical assistance from NDI, MESN should be able to add quantitative assessments to the qualitative evaluations offered by other observers. If all works to plan, USG-funded MESN will not only be able to verify the credibility of the final presidential results, but will also be able to provide numbers that tell the magnitude of specific election problems, hopefully countering any false claims by candidates or political parties. End Comment.

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